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Royce Statement on "Checking Terrorism at the Border"

WASHINGTON, DC -- Chairman Ed Royce (CA-40) made the following statement today, during his hearing on "Checking Terrorism at the Border."   Royce said that terrorists have defrauded America's border security and immigration system, including many since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He called on the Department of Homeland Security to restore law enforcement functions to the Citizenship and Immigration Services, and to properly screen applicants.

"Terrorists conspiring to attack our homeland often defraud and manipulate our immigration system. The 9/11 Commission found that up to 15 of the hijackers could have been stopped had we more diligently enforced our immigration laws. As one of today's witnesses will testify, dozens of terrorists have defrauded our immigration system, including many *since* 9/11, to remain in this country. These include individuals affiliated with al Qaeda and Hezbollah.

"Last week, this Subcommittee examined terrorist attempts to acquire shoulder-launched missiles that can down an airliner. Our homeland faces a very determined terrorist enemy --and our immigration policies and practices, I'm afraid, remain a porous defense.

"Indeed, one of our witnesses, an individual experienced as a top security official in the immigration field, will tell us in frank terms that our top immigration officials aren't taking seriously their responsibility to counter terrorism. United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, the agency that establishes the immigration status of millions of applicants yearly, remains deeply flawed, which a Government Accountability Office report highlighted last month.

"USCIS is riddled with fraud and corruption, we will hear from one witness, and the critical information needed to protect national security remains stove piped, with information sharing being frustrated. This puts those deciding immigration applications in the difficult position of not having access to key records held by other U.S. government agencies, including the FBI and the CIA, creating openings for terrorists. Moreover, there are too many uninvestigated complaints against the USCIS personnel who issue green cards, work visas, asylum, and other immigration standings, representing grave vulnerabilities. Some of these personnel themselves have not been adequately

investigated before being given the responsibility of frustrating attempts by terrorists and criminals to acquire the documentation needed to operate feely in our country.

"One of today's witnesses will tell of U.S. immigration documents being issued by foreign intelligence operatives. That is why I offered a successful amendment to the House immigration enforcement bill to ensure that law enforcement is a top USCIS priority.

"A big part of the problem is that those deciding applications are under pressure to reduce backlog. The Department of Homeland Security Inspector General in November, in documenting the agencies poor management controls, found that it "continues to operate under production pressures" --jargon for "move the applications as fast as you can." The March GAO report seconded this finding, noting that "production goals" are put over rooting out the type of fraud that terrorists commit in their planning. The system, it's clear, is rigged to approve immigration applications, and shortchange security. This report also found that "a number of individuals linked to a hostile foreign power's intelligence service were found to have been employed as temporary alien workers on military research." USCIS says it supports the ideal of "keeping America's doors open, but well guarded." The doors are open, for sure. But I don't see the security counterbalance, despite the lessons of 9-11.

"It is timely to examine these issues now, as Congress debates immigration policy. The Senate is likely to soon pass guest worker legislation. This policy, in which illegal immigrants are given legal status, will place tremendous new burdens on a deeply flawed USCIS. The President's budget request includes $247 million for USCIS to implement a guest worker program. Guest worker program or not --and I hope not-- more money without fundamental USCIS reform, and the will to protect national security, will accomplish nothing.

"Proponents of this controversial proposal should understand the concerns of many: hoisting this new demand to vet millions of applicants onto this flawed agency would break its back, and dangerously compromise our national security. A reading of the GAO report suggests that the USCIS performance is not improving. As chairman of the Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, I urge my colleagues and the American public to consider these serious shortcomings as we confront very resourceful terrorists who will do our nation as much harm as allowed."

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